

Message

From: Haslett, Brenda [Haslett.Brenda@epa.gov]
Sent: 12/18/2020 10:50:41 PM
To: Weeks, Frederick [Weeks.Fred@epa.gov]; Johnson, Arthur [Johnson.Arthur@epa.gov]; Shanahan, Katherine [Shanahan.Katherine@epa.gov]
Subject: RE: House to vote on continuing resolution to avert shutdown as talks continue

Drama is right... what else can we expect for 2020.

Thanks! Brenda

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From: Weeks, Frederick <Weeks.Fred@epa.gov>
Sent: Friday, December 18, 2020 5:15 PM
To: Johnson, Arthur <Johnson.Arthur@epa.gov>; Haslett, Brenda <Haslett.Brenda@epa.gov>; Shanahan, Katherine <Shanahan.Katherine@epa.gov>
Subject: House to vote on continuing resolution to avert shutdown as talks continue

The drama continues...

House to vote on continuing resolution to avert shutdown as talks continue

BY GRACE SEGERS

UPDATED ON: DECEMBER 18, 2020 / 4:34 PM / CBS NEWS

Washington — The House will vote Friday evening on a continuing resolution extend government funding through Sunday to allow negotiations over an omnibus spending measure and a coronavirus relief bill to continue. Both houses of Congress will have to vote on the bill and President Trump must sign it before 11:59 Friday night to avert a government shutdown.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has indicated his support for a continuing resolution, saying Thursday that the Senate is "highly likely" to work through the weekend as congressional leaders scramble to reach a deal.

"We are going to stay right here, right here, until we are finished, even if that means working through the weekend, which is highly likely," McConnell said in a speech on the Senate floor on Thursday. McConnell

added that if a continuing resolution was necessary, he hoped it would extend the deadline to fund the government by a "short window of time."

Senate Majority Leader John Thune warned Friday that the Senate might not pass a relief bill until Sunday, but he also said that he believed it would be a "pretty heavy lift" to pass a continuing resolution to extend government funding and avoid a shutdown.

"I was thinking best case scenario of getting something voted on was going probably to be Sunday but it may be later than that," Thune said. He added that a brief shutdown was the "likely conclusion."

A last-minute proposal by GOP Senator Pat Toomey to wind down some of the Federal Reserve's emergency lending programs stalled negotiations over the relief bill by Friday morning. Democrats worry that slashing the Fed's authority could be destabilizing for the economy and damaging for the incoming Biden administration.

"An agreement was in sight to deliver aid to the American people until Senator Toomey and Republicans inserted an 11th hour, purely political, unrelated provision to tie Biden's hands and risk throwing the economy into a tailspin," a senior Democratic aide told CBS News on Friday.

Senate Democrats accused Republicans of trying to insert a poison pill.

"We almost have a bipartisan COVID package, but at the last minute Republicans are making a demand that WAS NEVER MENTIONED AS KEY TO THE NEGOTIATIONS. They want to block the FED from helping the economy under Biden. It's the reason we don't have a deal," Hawaii Senator Brian Schatz tweeted. Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut tweeted that it was "fascinating" how "Republicans were fine with this Fed power when Trump was President but now all of a sudden it's bad."

"Almost like they want to use the COVID relief package to sabotage Biden's presidency," Murphy wrote.

Toomey said in a statement on Friday that his only intention was to wind down authorizations provided to the Fed by Congress in the CARES Act in March.

The clock is quickly running out for Congress to pass anything ahead of the Christmas holiday. Congress passed a continuing resolution last week to extend the deadline for government funding to December 18, but an additional week for negotiations does not appear to have been enough time for lawmakers to craft an omnibus spending bill that is mutually agreeable to the Democrats controlling the House and the Republican majority in the Senate. Lawmakers also wish to append a coronavirus relief bill to this omnibus measure, and congressional leaders are still negotiating that deal.

The need to pass a relief bill is just as urgent as an overarching government spending bill. Around 12 million Americans are set to lose their unemployment benefits the day after Christmas, with the expiration of the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation programs, which were established in the spring by the CARES Act. Nearly 500,000 people applied for the Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, intended to aid gig workers, in the week ending December 12.

The Lost Wages Assistance program, created by Mr. Trump via executive order in August, is also largely tapped out. Mr. Trump signed the order directing states to pay \$300 in supplemental weekly benefits on top of unemployment insurance in August, after a popular provision in the CARES Act providing an additional \$600

per week in unemployment benefits expired at the end of July. Meanwhile, some 885,000 people filed initial unemployment claims in the week ended December 12, the Labor Department said Thursday — an increase of 23,000 from the prior week.

A bipartisan, bicameral group of lawmakers last week introduced two bills amounting to \$908 billion which would address some of these issues, such as a provision to reinstate the weekly unemployment benefits at \$300 per week for four months.

McConnell, Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy have engaged in negotiations in recent days along with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin to come to an agreement on a bill largely based on this framework. The bill they are negotiating would also likely cost around \$900 billion, and also include a second round of direct payments to Americans under a certain income threshold.

The unlikely duo of Republican Senator Josh Hawley and Independent Senator Bernie Sanders have joined forces to push for \$1,200 direct checks, a larger amount than what top lawmakers are negotiating to be included in the bill. Both have threatened to allow government funding to lapse unless the Senate holds a vote on this issue.

Meanwhile, top lawmakers have insisted that they are nearing a deal on a relief bill for days, even as time is running out to come to an agreement. In his speech on Thursday, McConnell said that he did not want Congress to continue to "haggle and spar like this were an ordinary political exercise."

"After all these months, struggling Americans don't just need action. They need action fast," McConnell said.

The House passed a massive \$3.4 trillion relief bill in May and another smaller one in October, but McConnell and other Republicans refused to consider these bills due to the price tag. McConnell and Senate Republicans introduced a \$500 billion targeted relief bill, but it was blocked multiple times in the Senate by Democrats who argued that it did not go far enough.

But with a government shutdown looming and a new administration waiting in the wings to take office next year, congressional leaders have finally decided to start negotiating in earnest.

"I hope we also remember just how urgent the situation is for millions and millions of our fellow citizens," McConnell said on Thursday, nearly nine months after the CARES Act was signed into law.

Nancy Cordes contributed reporting.

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Grace Segers

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